













RETENTION OF MOISTURE IN THE SOIL.

That we can, by proper cultivation, retain the moisture in the soil to tide us over a period of drought is comparatively a new idea to most farmers. We used to think when we had planted our crop in good shape and cultivated it enough to keep the weeds out we had done our whole duty and if failure came we could not expect it with a clear conscience; but now a few specialists tell us we have enough moisture even in our driest years to produce a good crop if we will not cultivate as to stop evaporation and let all the moisture go to our crops. I believe this statement to be true; but whether our crops will pay for this extra cultivation is a question for each of us to decide. Some may live in a locality where they are not troubled with drought; but in a great part of the west for the past six or seven years, we have lacked moisture. No one with our fields from twenty to forty years under cultivation and the old prairie soil long exhausted, we find our soil readily becomes hard and dry. I do not believe that in the west with our large fields we should be able to so cultivate as to be able to produce a crop in seasons of greatest drought, but I do believe that the farmer of the west will in the future prepare a better seed-bed for his crops and each year strive to so cultivate that weed killing agents and how they will go to his hand. We think plowing is the first preparation for a crop, but especially if a field is to be plowed late, if it is disced as soon as dry enough you will be surprised to see how long it will remain moist and how easily it will be tilled. The harrow should follow the plow and the surface be thoroughly pulverized. Nearly all farmers realize the importance of this but I still see whole fields each year that are plowed before any harrowing is done, and in the spring they are in condition for a crop. The harrow is the cheapest weed killer and moisture saver we have and it should not have any rest as long as it will not injure the crop. Cultivation should be deep the first time, and eight small shovels are preferable to four large ones; but any cultivator leaves the surface too rough to retain the moisture. A weeder can be used after the cultivator and it leaves the surface in good shape and works the fine dirt around the plants as they can be done in no other way. A crop can be needed several times to advantage with the weeder if the field has been kept clean. If no heavy rains harden the surface a large acreage can be covered as it is with small shovels and a weeder can be used to loosen the soil. When any crop attains some size and the rains begin to reach out, cultivation should be shallow, for we cannot destroy the feeders of any plant without doing it to a greater or less degree, according to the moisture in the soil. Last season I watched a potato specialist raise ten acres of potatoes on the moisture saving plan and was surprised at the result. The ground was well prepared, planted with a horse planter and just as the plants were up it was cultivated very deep with a shovel cultivator. After that a weeder was used until the plants were too large, then a one-horse cultivator with harrow teeth back was used until the vines nearly covered the ground. The result was that during the dry weather in August, when our corn was suffering and the ground was dry and hard, the potatoes did not suffer in the least, and the soil saved to have enough moisture to mature two crops of corn. A specialist told us we must not say we cultivate with a light one-horse cultivator. I consider this impracticable where the soil is hard, the exception rather than the rule. I might give many illustrations of the difference in the yield under good or poor cultivation in times of drought, but this is unnecessary as every locality has its own object lessons. Intelligent cultivation will produce crops in any year but especially in periods of drought.—C. B. Noyes in an exchange.

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